

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 13745

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EAGR, MX
SUBJECT: RECENT LAND EXPROPRIATIONS BY MEXICAN AGRARIAN
REFORM SECRETARIAT

1. SUMMARY: THE MEXICAN SECRETARIAT OF AGRARIAN REFORM
ANNOUNCED AUGUST 18 THAT PART OF A LARGE
PRIVATE LANDHOLDING HAD BEEN EXPROPRIATED AND GIVEN TO
LANDLESS FARMERS. AT THE SAME TIME THERE HAVE BEEN
STORIES IN THE PRESS ACCUSING OTHERS, INCLUDING A NUMBER
OF AMERICAN CITIZENS, OF HOLDING LAND IN EXCESS OF THAT
PERMITTED BY THE MEXICAN CONSTITUTION. WE BELIEVE IT
UNLIKELY THAT THE GOM'S ACTION REPRESENTS THE START TO A
MAJOR DRIVE AGAINST LARGE HOLDERS, BUT IS MORE PROBABLY
A LARGELY SYMBOLIC NOD BY THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION TO
THE SACRED PRINCIPLE OF AGRARIAN REFORM. END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE FIRST LARGE LAND EXPROPRIATION ACTION OF THE
LOPEZ PORTILLO ADMINISTRATION, THE MEXICAN SECRETARIAT OF
AGRARIAN REFORM ANNOUNCED AUGUST 18 THAT THE "EL
GARGALEOTE" RANCH, SITUATED NEAR THE TOWN OF TAMUIN, IN THE
MEXICAN STATE OF SAN LUIS POTOSI, HAD BEEN PARTIALLY
EXPROPRIATED UNDER THE AGRARIAN REFORM LAW. ALMOST
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7,000 HECTARES OF THE 15,000 HECTARES RANCH IS TO BE
DISTRIBUTED TO A NEWLY FORMED EJIDO CONSISTING OF 133
PREVIOUSLY LANDLESS FARMERS.

3. THE RANCH HAD BELONGED TO RETIRED GENERAL AND
EX-GOVERNOR OF SAN LUIS POTOSI, GONZALO N. SANTOS. THE
REMAINING 8,000 HECTARES OF THE RANCH IS SUPPOSEDLY

REGISTERED IN THE NAMES OF SANTOS' RELATIVES AND WILL REPORTEDLY BE DIVIDED AT A LATER DATE. SANTOS IS A VISIBLE SYMBOL OF ILLEGAL LANDHOLDERS IN MEXICO AND CALLS FOR GOVERNMENTAL ACTION AGAINST HIS HOLDING STRETCH BACK AT LEAST 20 YEARS. HE REPORTEDLY HAS OTHER LARGE TRACTS OF LAND IN MEXICO AND RECEIVED A \$3,420,000 US DOLLAR LOAN FROM THE FIRST NATIONAL CITY BANK OF NEW YORK LAST MAY.

4. CONSEQUENTLY, LATE LAST WEEK A NUMBER OF NEWSPAPER STORIES, SOME BASED ON STATEMENTS OF CAMPESINO ORGANIZATION LEADERS, CALLED FOR THE BREAKUP OF SANTOS' HOLDINGS AND THOSE OF OTHER "LATIFUNDIOS", OR ILLEGAL LANDHOLDERS, EITHER IN AN ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE THE GOM OR, MORE LIKELY, TO PAVE THE WAY FOR THE GOM'S ACTION.

5. AMONG THE OTHER LATIFUNDIOS MENTIONED WERE A NUMBER REPORTEDLY OWNED BY AMERICAN CITIZENS, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY OF FORMER PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON, WHO WERE ACCUSED OF HAVING LARGE ILLEGAL LAND HOLDINGS IN THE MEXICAN STATE OF COAHUILA. THE EMBASSY WILL MONITOR THE SITUATION CLOSELY.

6. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE IT UNLIKELY THAT THE GOM'S ACTION AGAINST SANTOS REPRESENTS THE START OF A MAJOR DRIVE AGAINST LARGE LANDHOLDERS. IT MORE PROBABLY REPRESENTS A
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SENTS A LARGELY SYMBOLIC NOD BY THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION TO THE SACRED MEXICAN PRINCIPLE OF AGRARIAN REFORM. THE LOPEZ PORTILLO ADMINISTRATION HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY MADE A MAJOR LAND EXPROPRIATION AND THE NINETY YEAR OLD SANTOS PRESENTED AN EASY TARGET. HE HAS BEEN A VISIBLE SYMBOL OF LATIFUNDISMO IN SAN LUIS POTOSI, HOLDING HIS LAND FOR OVER 49 YEARS. AND, ALTHOUGH HE HAD BEEN A GENERAL IN THE ARMY AND GOVERNOR OF SAN LUIS POTOSI (1943-1949), HE HAD NOT BEEN ACTIVE OR INFLUENTIAL IN POLITICS SINCE THE MID 1950S. AS THE AGRARIAN REFORM BLOOD IS RUNNING BOTH AMONG CAMPESINOS AND THE PRESS, THERE MAY BE, HOWEVER, SOME ADDITIONAL EXPROPRIATIONS IN SAN LUIS POTOSI. WE FEEL THAT ANY ACTIONS WILL TEND TO BE DIRECTED AGAINST THE POLITICALLY POORLY CONNECTED AND WILL BE FOR SYMBOLISTIC RATHER THAN SUBSTANTIVE REASONS. END COMMENT.
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